

I Ching

("The Book of Change")

Foreword

Daniel Reid¹

Life is essentially a verb, not a noun. This is the first and foremost lesson in the *I Ching*, or *Yijing* 易經, which is why it's called *The Book of **Change***. Movement, activity, process, change—these are the basic facts of life, the fundamental forces of the universe that make the world go round, and we need to understand how they work in order to live life "on Earth as it is in Heaven." Concrete objects, physical bodies, molecular matter, all composite things change their form from moment to moment, and nothing is immutable, immortal, or immune to this ongoing process. In other words, there's not a noun on earth that isn't subject to the verb of constant change. In *Wisdom of the Taoists*, D. Howard Smith states this point as follows:

Seeing that everything, including themselves, is in a state of perpetual transition and change, they concluded that nothing observable is permanent. Nothing has a selfhood of its own. All is in process, never remaining the same for one moment.

The second basic premise of the *I Ching* is that the future is a set of infinite possibilities that may be narrowed down to a few fairly certain probabilities, if you

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understand the dynamics of change and learn how to detect their directional signals in the present. The *I Ching* offers us a precise view of our present situation, identifies the key currents of change that govern it, and indicates how the situation in question is unfolding, where it's leading us, and what choices we can make now in order to influence the process of change in a favorable direction.

Wu Zhongxian's presentation of the *I Ching* is a worthy and highly original contribution to Western scholarship and English literature on this revered Chinese classic, which ranks as the world's most ancient book. As someone who has often consulted the *I Ching*—always in conjunction with a well versed master—and read most its English translations, I am well aware that the *I Ching* does not lightly "reveal Heaven's secrets" (*lu tian-ji* 露天機) to those without the right foundation. It responds only to someone who has attained a sufficient degree of finesse in what the Chinese refer to as *xiu-shen yang-xin* 修神養心, literally to "refine the spirit and cultivate the mind." Only such a person is qualified as a vessel for insight and information from such a sacred source. By "sacred" I don't mean "holy"—this is not a matter of religion—I mean the pure, perfect, infinitely potent source of wisdom and power that abides in stillness and silence beyond the temporal world of form and function, a source which only highly polished minds can reflect. It's clear that Master Wu, who is heir to a long and venerable lineage of Tao, or Dao 道 masters in China, has refined his spirit and cultivated his mind to the level of wisdom and awareness required for this work, and it's obvious from his discourse that he knows the *I Ching* like an old friend.

Master Wu deals very well with the basic principle of trinity that runs throughout Taoist philosophy and science. We see the fundamental triune nature of human life on earth manifest in the triplex unities of the "Three Powers" (Heaven, Earth, and Humanity), the "Three Treasures" (Essence, Energy, and Spirit), and of course the three lines of the *Ba Gua* 八卦, the eight core trigrams that lie at the heart of the *I Ching*. Modern Western science is familiar with the duality of mind and matter, the duplexity of energy and mass, and the polarity of positive and negative forces—all of which traditional Chinese science refers to as the "Great Principle of Yin and Yang"—but it doesn't

understand the third factor, the one which brings the other two together and breathes life into the equation. That factor is consciousness. Consciousness is the missing link in modern Western science, but it's always been the central fulcrum in traditional Eastern science. Consciousness is the key that unlocks the gates of mystery and magic and bridges the gap between the formless and the formed.

Consciousness is the motive power behind all creation and change, the conductor of the music to which the polar partners of Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth, male and female dance through the universe. The science of quantum physics has recently verified the decisive role played by consciousness in the transformations of energy and matter, but the *I Ching* has taught this truth for thousands of years. Its pages provide us with a reliable way to foresee how the intricate interplay between the Three Powers of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity (i.e. energy, matter, and spirit) in a person's life now give rise to particular results later, and how the tides of change which mold the future may be favorably influenced by timely decisions in the present.

In a word that always rings a familiar bell for Western readers, consciousness is a "science," just like biology and chemistry, and the *I Ching* is a textbook that explains how this science works, and how intent, attitude, virtue, integrity, and other mental factors decisively influence the outcome of physical events. The *I Ching* maps the invisible paths of mind that wind behind the veils of the visible world and govern the sovereign state of "mind over matter."

I particularly like the way Wu Zhongxian approaches his discussion of the *I Ching* as a friendly tea talk with his readers. This format resonates especially well with me because during my sixteen-year residence in Taiwan, most of the teachings I've received from my own Taoist mentors came across the tea table, not in workshops or classrooms. Tea itself is one of the most ancient arts of China, deeply steeped in the Tao, and thus the tea table lends itself well as a platform for discourse on the subtle patterns in the tapestry of the *I Ching*. Preparing and drinking tea the Chinese way calms the spirit and clarifies the mind, establishing the perfect setting of serene awareness for discussing and consulting the *I Ching*.

Every Tao master I've ever known has also mastered the Way of Tea (*cha dao* 茶道), and Master Wu is no exception. Throughout his discourse, he reminds us that the taste of tea prepared the Chinese way, in accordance with the Tao of Tea, clearly reflects the energy and spirit of the hand that makes it, just as the lines in a hexagram always mirror the prevailing state of energy (change) and spirit (consciousness) in the life of the person who casts it. Indeed, with practice, the taste of tea may well reveal the truth as clearly as the structure of a hexagram, as suggested by one of my favorite pearls of Chinese tea wisdom:



Master Wu
"Zen And Tea Are One Taste"

cha chan yi wei 茶禪一味

"Tea and Zen are one taste"

I've read many books about the *I Ching*, in English as well as Chinese, but this is the first one that let me feel its pulse and hear its heart beat. It also taught me some interesting things about tea, which remains my personal favorite of the traditional Chinese arts.

So go prepare yourself a pot of good Chinese tea, do it the traditional Chinese way, and get ready for a personal introduction to the ancient *I Ching*, from someone who is very close to its original source.

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